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Leza L Olson 11/30/2006 08:02:19 AM From DB/Inbox: Leza L Olson

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 TEL AVIV 004677

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2016
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#)
SUBJECT: DEPUTY DEFENSE MINISTER SNEH UPDATES AMBASSADOR ON
AMA PROGRESS

REF: JERUSALEM 04836

Classified By: Ambassador Richard H. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh agreed with the Ambassador on November 27 that the negotiating teams for the implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) should begin meeting next week. He noted, however, that his own schedule may limit the ability to have regular meetings, and said that he needs more time to study all of the issues thoroughly. Sneh reported that he is working with the military on a plan to move forward with the removal of obstacles to movement in the West Bank, and has convinced Defense Minister Amir Peretz to open an existing, unused terminal south of Beit Shean that would give Palestinians access to Route 90, which traverses the Jordan Valley. He also floated the idea of holding a "mini-seminar" with representatives from the U.S., EU, and Israeli and Palestinian academic and private sectors to create action items for the Palestinian economic development working group. Sneh said that he would ask Pol-Mil Director Amos Gilad to look at reviving a pilot program for West Bank-Gaza Strip convoys, and expressed pleasure at the progress that General Dayton and Chief of Staff Gaby Ashkenazi are making on security plans for the Karni crossing. He suggested that the USG and GOI wait some time before talking about settlements and outposts, and reported that he has made some progress on permits for the entry of Palestinian workers, AmCits, and Palestinian students into Israel. End summary.

Timing for the Discussions

12. (C) Deputy Defense Minister Ephraim Sneh on November 27 gave the Ambassador and PolCouns a brief update on the progress that the GOI has made to begin discussing implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA).

Sneh agreed with the Ambassador that it is important to begin the talks and move forward with the process, and said that he would inform the Ambassador soon when the Ministry of Defense (MOD) is prepared to sit at the table with the USG. The Ambassador noted that the Embassy wants the negotiating teams to begin meeting next week, and suggested that the meetings be scheduled regularly to create a constructive rhythm. Sneh conceded that this is a good idea, but added that the limitation to these meetings is his own schedule. He acknowledged that there are some issues he has not yet studied, such as the transportation link between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, but said that this is not as urgent as the work the obstacles to movement team will be doing. He reported, however, that he is still "dealing with the military on obstacles, and I need a few more days." The Ambassador emphasized that the current cease-fire gives the USG and GOI an opening to help strengthen Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmud Abbas.

Obstacles to Movement

¶3. (C) On obstacles to movement, Sneh told the Ambassador that he had convinced Defense Minister Amir Peretz to activate an unused terminal south of Bet Shean near Bardala in the northern Jordan Valley as a way to give Palestinians access to Route 90 without jeopardizing Israeli security. He noted, however, that the terminal, before it could be used, would need some updating. Sneh also admitted that the IDF is "not enthusiastic" about lifting the ban on Palestinian travel in the Jordan Valley. Nonetheless, he added that he is moving forward with this idea, and that he hopes for a substantial breakthrough on obstacles in approximately one week.

Palestinian Economic Development

¶4. (C) Sneh related to the Ambassador that the MOD is interested in holding a "mini-seminar" on Palestinian economic development in approximately two weeks to create action items for the Palestinian economic development working group. He said that he would like to invite a professor from Tel Aviv University, Abbas's economic adviser, and representatives from the USG, EU, and the Palestinian private sector. He opined that the seminar should take place at a neutral location, possibly at a hotel, and the Ambassador offered his residence as a meeting place. Sneh replied that he would consider the offer and let the Ambassador know when he had fleshed out the concept of the seminar a little further.

Convoys

¶5. (C) The Ambassador told Sneh that the U.S. knows allowing convoys between the Gaza Strip and West Bank is very sensitive for the GOI, but he suggested that the cease-fire in Gaza has made the timing more propitious for a pilot program, which could always be discontinued if terrorist groups violated the cease-fire. The Ambassador noted that convoys could be discussed quietly in the higher-level core group between MOD's Pol-Mil Director Amos Gilad and the DCM; Sneh agreed. Sneh reported that Gilad is currently in Moscow, but that he would ask Gilad to look into reviving the pilot program when Gilad returns on Wednesday.

Crossings

¶6. (C) Sneh said that the recent Security Working Group meeting on Rafah (reftel) had gone very well, and noted that the MOD had approved the use of the donated Egyptian scanners. He added that work was progressing well between General Dayton and Chief of Staff Gaby Ashkenazi on Karni,

and reported that the MOD was looking at how to solve the problem of the empty containers at the crossing. The Ambassador emphasized that it is vitally important to resolve this issue as soon as possible; the U.S. has already paid \$1 million in demurrage charges. Sneh acknowledged that this is a problem, and said that his experience as former Minister of Transportation, and with the Israeli bureaucracy overall, had taught him that a minister must pay personal attention to a problem to have it solved. He said, "nothing moves" if a minister does not pursue it personally. Sneh said that he would probably have to go to Karni himself to get the containers released. Moving on, Sneh mentioned that he has considered running Karni on Shabbat as well. He said that because it is run by the Israel Airports Authority (IAA), it should be able to work on Shabbat like Ben Gurion Airport does. He commented that "even El Al flies on Saturday through its charter company," and added that he helped El Al get around the Shabbat restriction when he was transportation minister by allowing it to fly through Air Canada codeshare flights.

Settlements and Outposts

17. (C) In response to the Ambassador's question on moving forward with the discussion on settlements and outposts, Sneh responded that Peretz is personally dealing with the issue. He said, however, that he had recommended to Peretz that the discussion be postponed for a bit because in the last weeks Peretz has had to fend off a lot of criticism from "petty politics," and because in the next few weeks there are more urgent things on which to focus. Sneh assessed that Peretz would need to have the cooperation of the Prime Minister's Office when trying to remove outposts, and that he would also need to work with the Ministry of Internal Security and possibly the Ministry of Justice. "It'll be done, but I advise you to wait," he concluded.

Permits for Workers, AmCits
And Students

18. (C) Sneh reported that 26,000 Palestinian workers are now being allowed to enter Israel from the West Bank for work, and that 3,000 of them have overnight permits. He said that those workers were mainly participating in the olive harvest until the end of the month, and would then help in the citrus harvest beginning in December. He commented that he had asked the Ministry of Agriculture to submit figures to the MOD on what its demand would be for the citrus harvest, so that the MOD can prepare the permits, and added that the MOD was investigating how to allow Gazan workers into Israel, as well. Sneh also told the Ambassador that the MOD had approved the reinitiation of VIP permits for 60 Palestinian dignitaries, and had added 40 Palestinian judges to the list for a total of 100. (Note: VIP permits were suspended after the Hamas electoral victory. End note.) He said that the MOD would continue the policy of granting VIP permits to Palestinians, and had asked Dahlan and Erekat for lists of additional names of those who should receive the permits. He added that Wadi Nar checkpoint east of Jerusalem would be open that day.

19. (C) Sneh recounted that he and COGAT General Mishlev are working with the Ministry of Interior on permits for AmCits entering through Ben Gurion Airport. He explained that there is a small technical problem with finding the room to establish a help desk for a COGAT representative to help these travelers at the airport. He said, however, that he had appointed General Ophir to work with the IAA on this issue, and noted that if the issue was not resolved soon, he would become personally involved in the matter. In response to the Ambassador's question on Palestinian students trying to study in Israel, Sneh replied that the law is currently very restrictive and would have to be amended. He said that the law prohibits Palestinians from coming into Israel for

more than a cumulative 180 days, and acknowledged that this is not compatible with the needs of students who have to be in Israel for much longer periods. Sneh added that he is waiting for a pending case in the High Court to be resolved, and said that he hoped the High Court would rule in the Palestinian's favor, so that the Israeli law would have to be amended. He also commented that he would ask the MOD's legal adviser to suggest other legal solutions to make some exceptions. The Ambassador said that the GOI should strike a balance between security and flexibility, and argued that overly restrictive laws create ill will and can undermine security in the long-run. Sneh agreed, mentioning that "the infrastructure of terror is in people's hearts."

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JONES